



ATHENE BOOBOOK.

J. Gould and F.C. Richter del. a lith.

Hellmündel & Walton. Imp.

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Boobook Owl.

Strix Boobook, Lath. Ind. Orn. Suppl., p. xv. no. 9.—Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. vii. p. 262.

Boobook Owl, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. i. p. 362. no. 66.—Id. Gen. Syn. Suppl., vol. ii. p. 64.

Noctua Boobook, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 188.

Athene Boobook, Gould in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part I.

Buck-buck, Aborigines of New South Wales.

Goor'-goor'-da, Aborigines of Western Australia.

Mel'-in-de-ye, Aborigines of Port Essington.

Koor-koo, Aborigines of South Australia.

Brown or *Cuckoo-Owl* of the Colonists.

I HAVE seen individuals of this Owl from every one of the Australian colonies, all presenting similar characters, with the exception of those from Port Essington, which differ from the others in being a trifle smaller in size and paler in colour.

In Van Diemen's Land this species is seldom seen, while it is very common throughout the whole length of the southern coast of the continent. It appears to inhabit alike the brushes and the plains, that is, those plains which are studded with belts of trees. It is no unusual occurrence to observe it on the wing in the day-time in search of insects and small birds, upon which it mainly subsists. It may be readily distinguished from *Athene maculata* by its larger size, and by the spotted markings of its plumage; features which will be at once perceived by a reference to the figures of the two species.

The flight of this bird is tolerably rapid, and as it passed through the shrubby trees that cover the vast area of the helts of the Murray, it strongly reminded me of a woodcock. In such places as those I have last mentioned, travellers frequently flush it from off the ground, to which, after a flight of one or two hundred yards, it either descends again or takes shelter in any thickly-foliaged trees that may be at hand, when it can neither be easily seen nor forced from its retreat.

It breeds in the holes of the large gum-trees, during the months of November and December, and lays three eggs on the rotten surface of the wood, without any kind of nest. Three eggs procured on the 8th of November, by my useful companion Natty, were in a forward state of incubation; their contour was unusually round, the medium length of the three being one inch and seven lines, and the breadth one inch and four lines. They were perfectly white, as is ever the case with the eggs of owls.

"The native name of this bird," says Mr. Caley, "is *Buck-buck*, and it may be heard nearly every night during winter uttering a cry corresponding with the sound of that word. Although this cry is known to every one, yet the bird itself is known but to few; and it cost me considerable time and trouble before I could satisfy myself of its identity. The note of the bird is somewhat similar to that of the European *Cuckoo*, and the colonists have hence given it that name. The lower order of settlers in New South Wales are led away by the idea that everything is the reverse in that country to what it is in England; and the *Cuckoo*, as they call this bird, singing by night is one of the instances they point out." I believe that its note is never uttered during the day-time.

The sexes offer but little difference in the colouring of their plumage, but the female is the largest in size. A great diversity is found to exist in the colouring of the irides; some being yellowish white, others greenish yellow, and others brown.

Its food is very much varied, but consists principally of small birds and insects of various orders, particularly locusts and other Neuroptera.

Fore part of the facial disc greyish white, each feather tipped with black; hinder part dark brown; head, all the upper surface, wings and tail reddish brown; the wing-coverts, scapularies, and inner webs of the secondaries spotted with white; primaries and tail-feathers irregularly barred with light reddish brown, the spaces between the bars becoming buffy white on the under surface; breast and all the under surface rufous, irregularly blotched with white, which predominates on the abdomen; thighs deep tawny buff; irides light brown in some, greenish brown inclining to yellow in others; cere bluish grey; feet lead-colour.

The figures are male and female of the natural size.